"I like to take everything and put it in my own words": Historical Consciousness, Historical Thinking, and Learning with Community History Museums

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Abstract

This article presents findings from a recent case study involving seventh-grade students ($n = 25$) and a group of community history museum adult volunteers ($n = 5$). Over 14 weeks, participants engaged in a series of scaffolding activities designed around a Material History Framework for Historical Thinking. The purpose of the inquiry was to explore pragmatic applications for historical thinking within a community history museum. Data collection included pre- and post-*Canadians and Their Pasts* surveys, written assignments, photovoice photography, in-depth interviews, and a final class-room museum project. Conclusions are discussed within the context of Rüsen's (1987, 1993, 2004) typology of historical consciousness. This article presents a "call to action" for community history museums in Canada. It points to ways in which students can be empowered to become active members of a museum's community of inquiry.

Keywords: museum education, historical consciousness, historical thinking, material history

Résumé

Cet article présente les résultats d'une étude de cas récente portant sur des élèves de 7e année (n = 25) et un groupe de bénévoles adultes dans un musée d'histoire communautaire. Sur une période de 14 semaines, les participants ont fait une série d'activités d'étayage axées sur un cadre historique matériel favorisant une réflexion historique. Le but de cette recherche était d'explorer les applications pragmatiques de la réflexion historique au sein d'un musée d'histoire communautaire. La collecte de données s'est effectuée de diverses façons : sondages sur les Canadiens et leur passé avant et après les activités, exercices écrits, « photovoice », entrevues exhaustives et projet final de la classe. Les conclusions sont énoncées en tenant compte de la typologie de la conscience historique de Rüsen (1987, 1993, 2004). Cet article lance un appel à l'action aux musées d'histoire communautaire au Canada. Il suggère comment outiller des élèves pour qu'ils deviennent des membres actifs d'une communauté d'apprentissage en lien avec un musée.

Mots-clés : éducation muséale, conscience historique, réflexion historique, histoire matérielle

Introduction

Community history museums provide powerful sites for learning. When it comes to engaging with the past, there is little doubt that such community-based heritage institutions deliver convincing historical narratives. For educators, however, the challenge lies in moving beyond such narratives. This article presents findings from a case study involving a class of seventh-grade students (*n* = 25) and a group of community history museum adult volunteers (*n* = 5). Over a period of 14 weeks, participants were asked to adopt a series of scaffolding tools designed to support material history inquiry. In so doing, students became active members of the museum's community of inquiry. The benefits derived from this experience point to larger sociocultural discussions associated with critical inquiry, historical consciousness, and community-based learning.

Historical Consciousness and History Education in Canada

Historical consciousness is a relatively recent topic of interest for history education in Canada. As Peter Seixas (2015) has noted, Canada's *Zeitgeist* really only started in 2001 with the inaugural UBC symposium "Theorizing Historical Consciousness." What followed was a 2004 landmark publication of the same name that laid the groundwork for future empirical studies. This publication, however, was not a Canadian first for historical consciousness, since as early as 1994 historian Jocelyn Létourneau had been writing and pursuing research in this area.

The actual academic roots of "historical consciousness" can be traced back to Hans-Georg Gadamer and his theoretical treatise: *Le problème de la conscience historique* (1963). Gadamer's concept was later adapted by German didacticians Karl-Ernst Jeismann (1977) and Jörn Rüsen (1987), who proposed that rather than approaching history education as simply a transmission of substantive knowledge, the subject be reintroduced as instruction in the meta-competencies of thinking historically for oneself (Körber, 2008). Consequently, historical consciousness in German history education came to denote a renewed interest in "the specific and peculiar nature of historical thinking and explanation" (Rüsen, 1987, p. 281) that the study of history could enable. By extension, there could be no *right* or *wrong* historical consciousness—only differing types and values in thinking about the past (Körber, 2008). Paradoxically, however, historical

consciousness also came to embody a scholarly interest in identifying common shared narratives across Europe (Charland, 2003). This particular research interest was fuelled by the fall of the Berlin Wall, as well as subsequent reunification of East and West Germany (Lutz, 1997).

In Germany, Rüsen (1993) introduced a "typology of historical narration" (p. 6) that was primarily based upon the historiography of Leopold van Ranke, Johann Gustav Droyson, Hayden White, and Frank Ankersmit (Kölbl & Konrad, 2015). From these theoretical underpinnings, combined with a 1991 qualitative inquiry involving 249 high school students in the Ruhr District of Germany (Bracke, Flaving, Köster, & Zülsdorf-Kersting, 2014; Rüsen, Fröhlich, Horstkötter, & Schmidt, 1991), Rüsen (1987, 1999, 2004) subsequently developed a typology of historical consciousness that framed students' historical thinking around four broad categories:

- *Traditional* – Historical narratives are pre-given and furnish us with the origins of our values and form of life. The past is significant to the present as a continuity of obligatory cultural and life patterns over time. Time is experienced as repetition of an obligatory form of life.
- *Exemplary* – The past embodies rules of change and human conduct that remain valid for all times. Historical narratives exist as cases, or examples, providing lessons for the present. Time is experienced as representing general rules of conduct, or value systems. Change follows timeless rules.
- *Critical* – Traditional narratives are challenged and deviations are made from exemplary rules. Counterstories are produced to provide a critique of moral values. Time is experienced as problematizing actual forms of life and value systems.
- *Genetic* – Change is considered central to the past and gives history its meaning. Differing standpoints are accepted as integrated into a perspective of temporal change. Time is experienced as change of alien forms of life into proper ones. (Rüsen, 1987, 1993, 2004; Lee, 2004; Seixas & Clark, 2004)

These categories actually represented differences in epistemological beliefs about knowledge and authority—and of these four, Rüsen (1987) considered a genetic historical consciousness to be the most desirable for contemporary society (Seixas & Clark, 2004). Through the years since, although a great deal of scholarly work has been published around Rüsen's concept of historical consciousness, his typology remains highly

theoretical—since as Kölbl and Konrad (2015) have recently noted "convincing empirical evidence…is still lacking" (p. 19).

In examining the current field of Canadian empirical research regarding historical consciousness, scholarly studies can be grouped into three broad categories, representing slightly different research interests: (1) historical consciousness as shared narratives, (2) historical consciousness as a way of thinking about the past, and (3) historical consciousness as an expression of history in everyday life. Historical consciousness—as shared (meta) narratives—has been the primary focus of Collin, Cousson, and Daignault (2016), Létourneau (2014), Lévesque (2014), Robichaud (2011), Cormier and Savoie (2011), Zanazanian (2009), Létourneau and Moison (2004), and Clarke (1997). Historical consciousness—as a (metacognitive) way of thinking about the past—has been the primary focus of Larouche (2016), Gibson (2014), Duquette (2011), Gosselin (2011), Lévesque (2008), Trofanenko (2006, 2008), Seixas (2005), and Charland (2003). Conversely, the *Canadians and Their Pasts* study (Conrad et al., 2013) has focused on historical consciousness as an expression of history in everyday life. Although all of these studies have made a substantial contribution to understanding the historical consciousness of Canadians, they also point to a significant research gap, since to date very little empirical research has been undertaken in Canada with regard to middle school students (Grades 6–8) and their historical consciousness.

Methodology & Methods

The methodology adopted for this inquiry was informed by a sociocultural perspective. Research procedures were framed around Falk and Dierking's (2013) *Contextual Model of Learning*, as well as Rüsen's (2005) typology of historical consciousness. These models seemed most fitting for this inquiry, since one of the greatest challenges associated with developing a research design for a community history museum often rests with identifying learning. As Wertsch (2002) has pointed out, what works well in the controlled social environment of a classroom may not produce equally valid data results in the differently controlled social environment of a museum. Given such a distinction, Falk and Dierking (2013) have developed a contextual model of learning that identifies four broad contexts for data analysis: personal, sociocultural, physical, and temporal. This model has

been widely used by researchers in science museums, as a way of trying to make sense of how visitors learn in informal learning settings. This model also became relevant to my research question, since it recognizes the tacit nature of historical thinking in a museum, which manifests itself as historical consciousness. In addition, although Falk and Dierking's model is not specific to middle school students nor community history museums per se, I considered it to be broadly applicable to my research design, because it acknowledges that "learning begins with the individual. Learning involves others. Learning takes place somewhere" (Falk & Dierking, 2002, p . 36), and learning continues over time.

As a result, I chose a phenomenological case study methodology to enable in-depth and thick analysis of the lived experience of learning in a community history museum. This methodology lent itself well to researching the phenomenon of historical consciousness within two embedded units of analysis: students participating in the *lived experience* of community history museum fieldwork ($n = 24$), and adult volunteers participating in the same experience ($n = 5$).

In keeping with the instrumental case study method (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005), my design choice provided opportunities to explore pragmatic applications for historical thinking within a community history museum setting, as well as the phenomenological meaning both middle school students and volunteers drew from the experience. Since my research role was that of collaborative participant-observer, I developed mediational instruments intended to complement (rather than replace) regular classroom instruction. These instruments supported the New Brunswick social studies curriculum and explored the question of what life was like in British North America (1784–1867).

The central research question guiding my inquiry was: How can a heritage community assist middle school students in deepening their historical consciousness? Within this overarching question there were three procedural subquestions:

1. Can formal classroom instruction, adopting the Historical Thinking Project (2015) concepts for historical thinking, enable middle school students to think historically about the narratives they encounter within their community history museum?
2. Does participation in history museum fieldwork activities deepen the historical consciousness of these students?

3. Does student collaboration with older members of this volunteer heritage community deepen the historical consciousness of the older members themselves?

In this article I will respond to the central research question. I will also discuss my findings with regard to historical thinking in community history museums.

Over the course of 14 weeks (totalling 22 hours of class time) participants were asked to adopt a series of scaffolding tools designed to engage in material history domain knowledge. In so doing, participants followed a three-step process: (1) deconstructing the museum's exhibit narratives through historic space mapping (Figure 1), (2) close reading of an artifact source using a Material History Framework for Historical Thinking (Figure 2), and (3) reconstructing new historical narratives by creating a classroom museum (Figure 3). In keeping with this three-step process, research procedures were organized in three distinct phases:

- *Phase one (four weeks)*: Collaborating with the classroom teacher, museum executive director, and volunteers in preparing for the museum fieldwork experience; documenting participants' entry positions regarding historical thinking. Research instruments included the *Canadians and Their Pasts* survey (Conrad et al., 2013)—administered to both adult and student participants—as well as one in-depth group interview with adult participants, and student written documentation.
- *Phase two (four weeks)*: Documenting participants' engagement with the community history museum as active and independent learners. Research instruments included student historic space mapping of the museum exhibits (Cutrara, 2010), photovoice photography (Strack, Magill & McDonagh, 2004), material history object analysis documentation, two student written assignments, adult–student think-alouds, student artifact label-writing activities, and a series of in-depth (unstructured) adult group interviews that followed each museum visit.
- *Phase three (six weeks)*: Providing time for the learning to be independently re-interpreted and re-visited as a new experience. Research instruments included student material history object analysis activities, as well as the development of a classroom museum, and in-depth (structured) student group interviews (Appendix A). As a final exit activity, all participants (both adults and students) were asked to re-complete specific portions of the *Canadians and Their Pasts* survey.

Figure 1. Students engaged in historic space mapping of the museum narratives.
Credit: Author.

Figure 2. A material history framework for historical thinking in museums (adapted from
Elliot et al., 1994)

Figure 3. Final classroom museum exhibition project. Credit: Author.

During the first two phases of the inquiry, students (*n* = 25) visited the museum four times and the museum volunteers (*n* = 5) visited their classroom four times. During the final phase, students remained in their classroom, working independently of the volunteers and the museum. The ultimate intent of this design was to map out the phenomenon of historical consciousness over a bounded period of time, and to document any changes that may have occurred regarding participants' narratives about the past.

Findings and Implications for History Education Research

One of the central premises of historical thinking is the belief that students can be empowered to "read the texts that structure their lives" (Seixas, 2001, p. 561). In this case study, historical thinking commenced with students actually examining the official narratives they encountered within the museum. For the most part these narratives represented an eclectic assemblage of messages (both textual and visual) that reflected the interests and priorities of the museum's board of directors. Over the 14-week unit of inquiry students became actively engaged in discovering and deconstructing the narratives that they encountered within the museum by analysing the artifact sources behind such narratives, and reconstructing their own narrative claims. Students were thus encouraged to extend their purview beyond the authority of the museum message, and, as such, independently

focus their attention upon a specific artifact source, drawing evidence from that source, asking questions, corroborating the source, and making inferences that were evidence based. As a result, students challenged the authority of the museum and came to recognise complexity in interpreting the past. Slight shifts in historical consciousness also became evident within their beliefs about knowledge, although students' narrative re-constructions remained intrinsically shaped by the museum itself. In addition, during the inquiry process, students' social roles transformed from passive listeners to active participants, while adults' social roles transformed from information-transmitters to collaborative agents. These findings have implications for research in history education—particularly with regard to authority, knowledge, community engagement, and historical thinking in museums.

Authority and Historical Narratives

Educational researchers have identified several factors that are believed to influence students' uncritical acceptance of historical narratives. In particular, when presented with an authoritative single claim in which the author and sources remain anonymous (e.g., school textbooks or museum exhibits), Levstik (2008) has found that students approach such narratives as the final authority. Likewise, the impact of familiar narratives (to which students may easily relate) can also be problematic, since familiarity may mislead students to fixate on their initial response and not examine alternative perspectives (p. 26). In her research, Levstik found that by changing the learning context via situating students as active members of a community of learners (and thus changing the lines of authority), students became more interested in studying history and more engaged in a deeper exploration of their topic (p. 27). At the same time, however, Levstik also found that—even as active learners—only a few students become "spontaneously critical" of the interpretations they encountered, and most continued to accept such narratives as "unimpeachable" (p. 27). To this end, Seixas (2001) has proposed that by demonstrating history to be complex and contradictory, students may become more critical of the narratives they encounter. Seixas (2016) has thus argued that by adopting a disciplinary approach to historical inquiry—using primary and secondary sources—students and educators alike may be moved beyond the familiarity of what they *think* they know (and the historical narratives they wish to accept), to recognize the impeachable nature of such narratives. Without

such a disciplinary approach to history education, Seixas (1993a, 1993b, 1994) and others (Husbands, 1996; Létourneau, 2014; Lévesque, 2008; Nokes, 2013; Shemilt, 1987) have all maintained that students will continue to accept the authority of historical narratives—both inside and outside of the classroom—without question.

In drawing comparisons to the findings from this inquiry, the adoption of a Material History Framework for Historical Thinking (Figure 2) seemed to enable participants to formulate more complex narratives about the past. As a result, their reconstructed historical claims became individually unique responses rather than direct appropriations of the official museum narrative. For example, regarding a military arms chest included within the War of 1812 exhibition, the museum description narrative read as follows:

> This old pine box reinforced with iron, fits the description of an arms chest used to store muskets. Other than some tin patches it has no markings. Oral history from the donor claims that it was used by the 104th Regiment.

By comparison, the students' narrative reconstruction, while incorporating selected portions of the official narrative, became individually unique, as this student described:

> Locked Up!
>
> My artifact is an arms chest from the war of 1812. It was made from a solid block of pine; it has rope handles, and a metal latch. This chest was used in the war of 1812, specifically the march of the 104th. This chest was used for transporting weapons, on the inside there would be dividers like an egg carton. My artifact was used in the war of 1812 to transport muskets and other weapons.
>
> This chest was a very important part of the 1800s, as it helped in the war of 1812. My artifact is important to keep because it shows that there were very large trees, and it shows that people could make things. My artifact is important because, without it, it would have been harder to transport weapons; therefore, the chest helped in the war of 1812.

As this example illustrates, over time students extended their purview beyond the authority of the museum by focusing their attention upon a specific artifact source, drawing evidence from that source, asking questions, corroborating with other artifact sources, and making inferences—to various degrees. As a result, students drew personal meaning from

the artifact, and their interpretations became more focused on the authority of the artifact as a source of evidence to support their own narrative claims.

At the same time, however, the narratives students constructed remained implicitly shaped by the museum's authority, since their claims (although individually unique) were shaped by several contextual factors: (a) the physical location of where they had encountered the artifact within the museum, (b) what other artifacts shared the same exhibit space, (c) what understandings they gained from the museum volunteers, (d) what information students found in the artifact accession files, and (e) what students found from consulting secondary sources. Such findings challenge researchers to consider the implicit nature of primary and secondary sources, which may inevitably lead students to trust in the authority of an assemblage of evidence that ultimately represents a specific constructed narrative. For example, in the case of this particular museum, students encountered very few instances of explicitly contradictory or alternative evidence. Such a scenario falls short of the historical thinking environment that Seixas (2016) has described. It also points to an avenue for further research—as both Gosselin (2011) and Trofanenko (2014) have proposed—regarding how museum exhibits might be better designed to facilitate more critical analysis of the narrative authority.

Nevertheless, in establishing parallels with Levstik's (2008) study of a sixth-grade learning environment, adult participants in this inquiry initially adopted an authoritarian role that reflected an information-transmission model for learning. In this sense, students were initially expected to accept a passive role as *listeners*. Over time, however, as students became increasingly more familiar with the museum learning environment, adults became more at ease with surrendering their positions of authority. Concurrently, as students became more familiar with curatorial methods of historical inquiry, adults began to transition toward a collaborative inquiry model. Within this transition process—much like Levstik (2008) has described—students became their own agents for learning, and adult participants came to include the students in their community of inquiry. Likewise, students' trust in museums became less grounded in a traditional authority, and more grounded in a genetic authority of common development.

Knowledge and Historical Narratives

As Ashby (2011) has postulated, visual objects and artifacts hold great potential for historical thinking (perhaps more so than written documents), since the visual element of such sources can initially prompt students to ask "What is it?" as opposed to "What does it say?" (p. 140). In this sense, Ashby speculates that students can be motivated to look beyond the face-value of the written source—to more closely examine the historical context of the source. In her own study involving students in Grades 2 to 8, Ashby (2004) found that the largest proportion (nearly 40%) of sixth-grade participants ($n = 75$) turned to the authority of books and/or experts to validate a historical narrative. Likewise, only 10% attempted to reconstruct the context of the historical narrative by actually questioning and validating evidence within the narrative itself (p. 5). This points to a clear distinction in epistemological beliefs—between knowledge that is found and knowledge that is reconstructed.

By comparison, the findings from this case study indicate that initially only a combined quarter of the students proposed a strategy of doing research (17%) or comparing and corroborating information (8%)—as a way of validating disagreements about the past. Upon completion of the inquiry, however, more than a combined half of the students proposed doing research (22%)[1] or comparing and corroborating information (30%).[2] These increases, although slight, suggest changes were occurring in some of the students' epistemological beliefs. These findings also lend support to Ashby's (2011) more recent statements regarding the pedagogical value of using artifacts to teach about evidence and sources.

Yet although participation in this inquiry appears to have changed some students' beliefs around the constructed nature of historical narratives, the question still remains: What parameters may have been framing (and thus limiting) their narrative reconstructions? As Foster and Yeager (1999) have pointed out, historical thinking can be restricted in a formal learning setting, when students are presented with pre-selected sets of sources for analysis that lead to pre-determined narrative outcomes. In this sense, evidence is perceived as neatly fitting together, like a jigsaw puzzle, with no contradictions or gaps.

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1   Representing an increase by one student participant.

2   Representing an increase by five student participants.

In the case of this inquiry, students encountered the problematic nature of historical inquiry, since artifact sources were often found to provide limited evidence relating to their research question. In some instances, the artifact sources also provided contradictory (or irrelevant) evidence. Nevertheless, in reconstructing their claims about the past, students' narratives remained intrinsically shaped by the museum itself. Hence, in keeping with Foster and Yeager's (1999) findings, while students were actively engaged in historical inquiry, they were also limited by the parameters of the museum collection. This raises questions for future research regarding how museum collections might be opened up to alternative perspectives, thus incorporating contradictory, critical, or controversial elements into the exhibition narrative.

Engaging in a Critical Community of Inquiry

Very little empirical research currently exists that bridges the gap between formal and informal learning in history education (van Boxtel, 2010). This empirical void is problematic, since as Barton (2001) has found, there exists an interesting correlation between formal classroom instruction and how students use informal knowledge to expand their understandings about the past. In his comparative study involving students within a similar age group in Northern Ireland and the United States, Barton observed that in Northern Ireland the informal experiences students encountered outside of school, combined with formal history instruction received within school, enabled students to "create a more sophisticated understanding of the role of evidence in historical enquiry" (pp. 4–5). By contrast, in North America, both Barton and Trofanenko (2014) have remarked that such a relationship between formal and informal learning exists more as an ideal than a reality in most schools.

In the Netherlands this divide is reportedly non-existent (van Boxtel, Klein, & Snoep, 2011). This is because, as Savenije, van Boxtel, and Grever (2014) have explained, Dutch teachers are encouraged to incorporate remnants of the past into formal classroom instruction by (among other things) using historical objects in the classroom, visiting museums and historic sites, and interviewing elder members of their communities (p. 519). In this context, van Boxtel (2010) has proposed a "dynamic" approach to learning about the past, which involves providing students with six points of engagement:

- to explore and reflect on informal heritage practises "by becoming active players in interpreting, using and preserving heritage";
- to become "meaning makers" by assuming active roles in establishing historical significance for themselves;
- to commence with their own "entrance narratives" about the past;
- to explore a plurality of perspectives;
- to employ historical thinking concepts to "deconstruct invented traditions and recognise historical inaccuracies and simplifications"; and
- to participate in the process of sharing knowledge through open dialogue about meaning and significance. (pp. 55–59)

All of these suggest a repositioning of student social roles within a heritage community—moving from *passive* listeners, to *active* participants, and sharing an authority with others (of all ages) to rewrite community narratives.

Indeed, one of the most significant findings drawn from this inquiry is the transformation that occurred in social roles within the community history museum. By the end of the 14-week unit of study, it was evident that students perceived themselves as active members of a community of inquiry. Likewise, through the experience of student collaboration, adult participants came to empathize with the students as historical researchers, and by the end of the inquiry were demonstrating a sense of respect for student knowledge. In this sense, adult participants were rethinking their role as experts, and perceived the students as junior researchers—capable of encountering the past "in their own reality." The *we-versus-them* relationship had changed dramatically, since adults were perceiving the students as part of their community of inquiry. These findings are significant because they support Silverman's (2010) claim that interaction within a museum—between museum artifacts and other people—can enable individuals to "express and affirm key roles" in society, as well as "develop new ones" (p. 56).

In drawing comparisons to van Boxtel's (2010) concept of "dynamic heritage," participants in this inquiry became actively involved in the *six points of engagement* by deconstructing the museum exhibits using historic space mapping, as well as modelling curatorial historical thinking, engaging in dialogue with their peers, and reconstructing the museum on their own terms. The benefits derived from these activities—as Lévesque (2006) set forth in his challenge to museums 10 years ago—were that students became

engaged "in the story (or stories) that relics are supposed to tell, and ultimately (re)construct their own narrative accounts of the collective past" (p. 46). In turn, students' strategies for coping with conflicting narratives shifted toward seeing themselves as agents within the community of inquiry, capable of deconstructing the narratives they encountered. This transformation warrants further investigation, since it points to the potential of a material history framework for enabling more sophisticated historical thinking in museums—in ways that are student-driven and respectful of students' social role as "meaning makers" (van Boxtel, 2010, p. 56).

Historical Thinking in Museums

As Jones (2014) and Savenije et al. (2014) have found, when museum collections are used simply to support a particular narrative claim (rather than reflect critically upon that claim), students in this age group (i.e., Grade 7) accept the authority of the museum while selectively adapting portions of the narrative to reinforce their own pre-existing understandings of the past. In this way, they reinterpret and rationalize portions of the museum narrative in order to accommodate their own worldview. As a counterbalance to this, van Boxtel (2010) has recommended that scaffolding tools be adopted to enable students to "critically question and evaluate how the past is represented…in order to deconstruct invented traditions and recognize historical inaccuracies or simplifications" (p. 59). Likewise, Nakou (2001, 2006) and Husbands (1996) have emphasized the role of museum education in providing students with opportunities to decode meaning from museum collections. According to these authors, decoding can be achieved by commencing with the "minitheories" (Husbands, 1996) students bring to the museum, and then focusing upon museum artifacts—as a way of going "beyond the historical interpretation that each museum implies" (Nakou, 2006, p. 87). Such a learning dynamic has also been identified by Rowe, Wertsch, and Kosyaeva (2002) as a complex relationship between *vernacular* and *official* narratives, and is attributed to creating an individual sense of belonging to a particular societal group. As Rowe et al. (2002) have pointed out, this learning dynamic is not simply a process of direct appropriation. Instead, visitors draw from "personal experience to illustrate, support or potentially deny the truth or authority of the official account" (p. 109).

As such, the promise of historical thinking in museums rests with enabling students to interact with *official* museum narratives, using more than pre-existing (*vernacular*) "minitheories" as their single point of validation. To this end, Seixas and Morton (2013) have proposed that museums serve as useful learning environments for teaching the historical thinking concepts of *historical significance* and *evidence and sources*. In comparing Seixas and Morton's (2013) criteria for historical thinking against findings from this inquiry, it is broadly apparent that students found the fieldwork experience to be difficult as well as rewarding, fun as well as serious, creative as well as meaningful (p. 9). During post-study interviews, students indicated that they enjoyed the museum experience for three specific reasons: (1) wonder and discovery, (2) experiencing the real thing, and (3) reconstructing the past. At the same time, however, many also indicated that they found the research process challenging, since many could not locate the types of narrative information they were used to gathering. In this sense, they experienced history as intriguing, yet problematic and incomplete. By adopting a Material History Framework for Historical Thinking (Figure 2), participants were enabled to analyze the museum exhibits as "curatorial publications" (Schlereth, 1981, p. 163) and thus critically re-examine the validity of the museum's narrative claims. Participants were also enabled to employ a unique set of procedural criteria—based upon the discipline of *material history* (Jordanova, 2012).

In establishing historical significance, students adopted revealing and/or symbolic patterns of significance that reflected their own unique experiences of material history analysis. As a result, although few students demonstrated significance as stemming from change (Seixas & Morton, 2013), the museum fieldwork experience did appear to impact students' epistemological beliefs regarding the authority of sources of information about the past. In this sense, students' explanations for significance shifted toward recognizing a process of historical inquiry in which they had been active participants. Accordingly, artifacts became significant for what they revealed to them—as individuals—or what they symbolized for them—as individuals. In this way students seemed to establish their own personal sense of relevancy to the present.

With regard to the historical thinking concept of evidence and sources, all of the students became competent in focusing their attention on a specific artifact source and drawing evidence from that source—by employing a combination of description and inference processes. Whether the resulting inferences were "insightful" (Seixas & Morton,

2013, p. 49) is a matter of subjectivity; although, if the students had been provided with conflicting sources of evidence for comparison and corroboration, we may have been able to assess "insightfulness" more precisely. Clearly, however, many of the students experienced difficulty in asking "good" questions (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p. 49) about their artifact source. Although it is apparent that more formal instruction in enabling students to develop research questions would have been beneficial (a procedure that adult participants described as an evolutionary process), students nevertheless became competent in asking both information and convergent questions (Husbands, 1996). The museum fieldwork experience also seemed to lend itself well to asking *who-what-when-where-why* questions about a source. All of the students became competent in this sourcing activity.

During the 14-week unit of study, students came to understand the constructed nature of museum narratives. Their resulting narrative reconstructions, although limited by the parameters of the museum collection, were source-specific, and did not reflect the intended expectations of adult participants. This points to an area for further research since, although there is no evidence to suggest that the "decoding" process of the Material History Framework for Historical Thinking enabled participants to "go beyond the historical interpretation that each museum implies" (Nakou, 2006, p. 87), the learning dynamic did seem to enable students to reinterpret the past in their own words—and these narrative reconstructions did seem to mirror what Rowe et al. (2002) have described as a complex relationship between *vernacular* and *official*. Although isolated, and seemingly disconnected from an official *big idea* in history, the individual "little narratives" (Rowe et al., 2002) that students constructed were instead unique (personal) insights that linked each student to the community history museum in some way.

Overall, as Nakou (2001) has found (and this inquiry also confirms), students' ability to think historically about the narratives they encountered within the community history museum related specifically to the level of difficulty that the artifacts presented for historical inquiry. Accordingly, although the Material History Framework for Historical Thinking (Figure 2) was found to be very beneficial in enabling students to work creatively with sources and evidence, four specific factors seemed to limit their ability to achieve what Seixas and Morton (2013) have described as "powerful understandings" (p. 3). First, without sufficient artifact documentation to work with (in some instances), students resorted to making mental leaps or pursuing research dead-ends. Second, without sufficient background knowledge to establish historical context for their artifact

source, many students experienced difficulties in developing probing questions to frame their research. Third, this deficiency in background knowledge also resulted in students ultimately failing to fully perceive each of their *micro* projects as connected to a *big idea* in history. Lastly, limited by the community history museum sources with which they had to work, few students adopted alternative perspectives by incorporating contradictory, critical, or controversial elements into their narrative reconstructions. These limitations are not insurmountable, however; further empirical research is required, working with a broad range of history museums and various styles of museum exhibitions—including museum exhibitions that are explicitly designed to support historical thinking.

Rüsen's Typology of Historical Consciousness Revisited

Having explored the phenomenon of historical consciousness through empirical research using Rüsen's typology of historical consciousness as an analytical guide, the question remains: How can a heritage community assist middle school students in deepening their historical consciousness? In this sense, a "deep" historical consciousness correlates to what Rüsen (1987, 1993, 2004) has labelled a "genetic" historical consciousness—and can now be redefined to include the following factors.

In *everyday life*, a genetic historical consciousness reflects a high level of engagement in a wide variety of communication media: photographs, movies and documentaries, history websites, computer history games, history books, museums and historic sites, archives, family places, family documentation activities, and hobbies. In this sense, a heritage community can assist middle school students by making more of these resources easily and readily available to students in meaningful ways—for use both inside and outside of the classroom. More specifically, in establishing narrative claims, these heritage resources must be well researched, well referenced, and draw upon a wide variety of primary sources. The end user must be able to access and examine the primary sources in order to witness and critically evaluate the narrative. The end user must also be able to establish personal connections to the resource by becoming actively involved in his or her own learning process.

As *shared narratives*, a genetic historical consciousness reflects the use of complex templates for remembering and incorporating a wide variety of standpoints

or perspectives from multiple individuals or groups of people. In this sense a heritage community can assist middle school students by providing learning opportunities that respect a plurality of points of view, diversity, and conflicting perspectives. For students participating in this inquiry, making connections to people who lived in the past became a common theme within the genetic narratives that they constructed.

As a *way* of thinking about the past, a genetic historical consciousness recognises complexity within a community of inquiry—where knowledge or understanding is re-constructed from a variety of differing standpoints and perspectives, using multiple primary and secondary sources (that are often incomplete), to infer, corroborate, and contextualize evidence. In this sense, a heritage community can assist middle school students by opening up their community to include students as active participants (rather than passive listeners) in the process of historical inquiry. This involves reversing the lines of communication to embrace student-driven historical inquiry that is based upon historical thinking (rather than information-transmission)—using artifacts (and other types of primary documentation) as sources of evidence.

Conclusion

The findings from this case study present a "call to action" for community history museums in Canada. When empowered to engage in meaningful historical inquiry, students in this inquiry established personal relevancy to the past—a relevancy that was based upon evidence and sources. In this sense, historical thinking and historical consciousness operated hand in hand. These findings point to an important social role for community history museums in history education. To achieve such a role, however, museums must open up their community of inquiry to include students as active (and respected) members of their community.

Appendix A

Interview protocol, adopted from Levstik and Barton (2008):

1. Why did you choose this artifact for your inquiry over the others in your photo collection?
2. If you could have chosen another artifact in the museum, what would it have been? Why?
3. What meaning have you drawn from your artifact?
4. Is it important or not? Why?
5. Does it belong in a museum, do you think? Why?
6. Did you do a heritage fair project last year in school?
7. When you think back to when you were younger (in Grade 5, for example), do you think you would have made the same artifact choices? Why?
8. Now what about older people like, say, your parents or your grandparents, if they were visiting the museum and they had to choose an object, do you think they would choose the same one as you? Or would they choose something different? Why?
9. Thinking back between now and when we started in January…what did you like the best of all the activities we did, and what did you like the least? Why?
10. Thank you…I certainly appreciate working with you, and I look forward to seeing your final project.

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